STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

A Family Foreclosed and Evicted in Oakland

Story & photo by David Bacon

At 8 a.m. on Monday morning, July 20, ten Alameda County Sheriffs pulled up in their patrol cars in front of the tan house on the corner of Tenth and Willow in West Oakland, the oldest African American neighborhood in the city, and one of the oldest on the West Coast.

The renovated home is surrounded by an iron fence, and the sheriffs poured through its open gate and up the stairs.

Tosha Alberty had just left for her job as a transportation services coordinator for Alameda County. Her children were still at home, though. Sheriffs told her adopted son Christian, an autistic nine-year-old who was still in his undershorts, to get dressed.

Alberty's daughter Sharquita rushed to collect the bottles and diapers she needed to take care of her nine-month-old baby Zmylan. All of them were then hustled out of the front door, down the steep steps, through the gate in the iron railings, and onto the sidewalk.

Sheriffs had threatened to evict the family before, an action stymied when a local locksmith, seeing that he was about to shut the family out of their home, had refused to cooperate. This time, however, a more compliant locksmith drilled out

See **Foreclosure in West Oakland** *page 11*



When 10 police officers rushed into Tosha Alberty's home to evict her family, Alberty's daughter Sharquita *(above)* was forced to leave with her nine-month-old baby Zmylan, and Alberty's autistic son Christian, age 9, was locked outside.

Harbinger of the Future: Devastated Detroit

Story & photo by Robert L. Terrell

The full significance of the financial crisis bedeviling the United States, and much of the rest of the developed world, is clearly apparent to those who dare seek to acquire an up-close and personal view of the massive, full-spectrum collapse under way in Detroit

The once prosperous city used to be one of the nation's most prestigious industrial centers, providing well-paying jobs and upward social mobility to residents throughout southeastern Michigan. But this is no longer the case.

Detroit is collapsing, and the tragic, seemingly irreversible process is destroying the dreams and financial viability of an entire region crucial to the nation's overall economic health and well-being.

Taken as a whole, the scale of destruction and decline is unprecedented in U. S. history, excepting times of prolonged warfare. For this reason, and many others, more critical attention should be devoted to the manner in which forces such as deindustrialization and globalization are spreading hardship and chaos that may well eventually engender catastrophic collapse across the length and breadth of this still wealthy nation.

The scene shifts from troubled to disastrous as one rides into Detroit along any of the major corridors leading into the down-

See **Desolation Row, Detroit** *page 12*

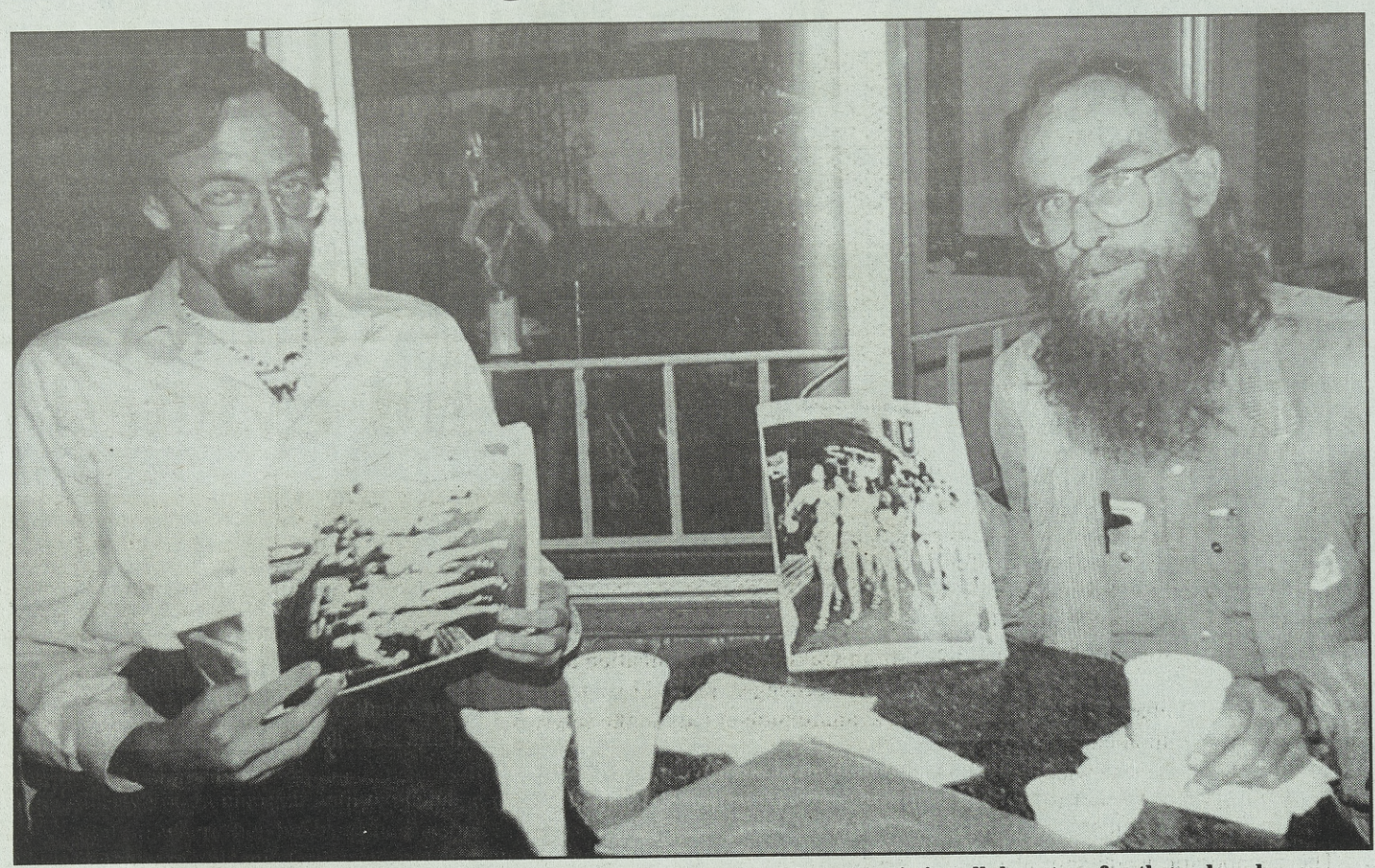


In virtually every section of Detroit, the burned-out hulks of abandoned buildings are unmistakable signs of the massive decay underway in the heart of the city. The boarded-up hulks that tens of thousands of people used to call home, have come to symbolize contemporary Detroit — and they convey a stark warning to the nation.

The Off-Beat Artistry of an 'Archetypal Weirdo'

The alienated life and weird times of legendary street artist B.N. Duncan

B.N. Duncan looked like your weird uncle that you kept in the basement, out of sight. He was the archetypal weirdo artist and an anthropologist of the gutter.



Berkeley street artists Ace Backwords *(left)* and B.N. Duncan were friends and artistic collaborators for three decades.

by Ace Backwords

Telegraph Avenue legend B.N. Duncan died in Berkeley on Saturday, June 27. He was 65. I first met Duncan at Krishna Copy on the corner of Telegraph and Dwight way back in 1979. He was xeroxing off copies of *Tele Times*, a little homemade magazine he published. And I was xeroxing copies of *Ass Backwards Comix #1*. So we were on the same page, literally, from the word go.

Geez, I must have been 23, so Duncan was 36. He looked like a weird old man with his disheveled hair and thick horn-rimmed glasses and ratty old clothes. He looked like your weird uncle that you kept in the basement, out of sight. He was the archetypal weirdo artist.

At the time, he lived in a dusty little hotel room on the 4th floor of the Berkeley Inn. His room was just beginning to clutter up with his boxes of artwork. He had one or two friends who were just as weird and alienated as him. Aside from that, he had almost no social life.

Duncan spent his whole life on the fringe of society, a life-long SSI recipient. I figured we were both a couple of losers who would spend our lives xeroxing off 20 copies of our latest cartoons and mail*ing them out to an indifferent world.*

"Outsider art," he called his work. In fact, Duncan had a strong identification with Van Gogh, and figured his work would never be fully appreciated in his lifetime. He was an artistic genius, in my opinion.

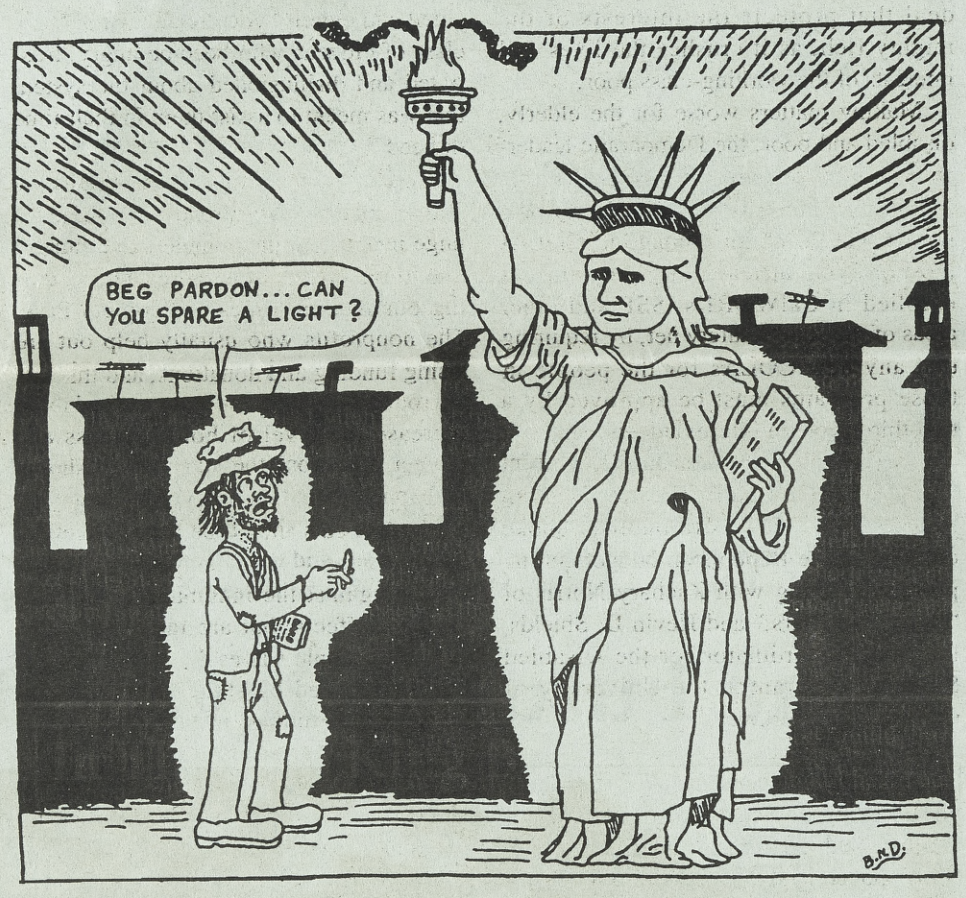
In the late 1960s, Duncan had gone completely nuts. He was completely alienated and couldn't find any place to fit into society He'd hear voices — six distinct characters who would carry on private conversations in his head. He ended up getting locked up in a mental institution. The head psychiatrists told him he was a hopeless case and would probably have to spend the rest of his life in the nut house. So that shows you how far he came to have the magnificent life he had.

Duncan published the first 20 issues of *Tele Times* — "Telegraph's Tight Little Monthly" — in relative obscurity, with print runs of about 100 copes. In truth, he probably lost money on every single publication he ever put out by himself.

He was one of the first publishers to focus on homeless street people and so-called ordinary people — this was the mid-1970s after all — treating them the same way that most mainstream publishers treated celebrities. As usual, Duncan was ahead of his times.

Then he began corresponding with famed underground cartoonist R. Crumb. They immediately clicked. Crumb recognized a fellow traveler, calling Duncan "the quintessential underground cartoonist." And Crumb should know.

Duncan published an interview with Crumb and his wife Aline in *Tele Times*, and that opened up whole new worlds for Duncan. For Duncan was an "artist's artist." Though his work was vastly underappreciated by the general public, he was revered by many of the greats in the cartooning field; people like Kim Dietch, Dan Clowes, Peter Bagge, and Harvey Pekar.



B.N. Duncan's unforgettable image of a panhandler asking the Statue of Liberty for a light suggests that those living on the street must beg even for the light of freedom.

Maybe with guys like Duncan, who are so weird and unique, it just takes time for the world at large to catch up with them. But other artists usually know.

In 1989, on a whim, I got the crazy idea to publish a photo calendar of Berkeley street people. I wanted to take the raw and quirky work Duncan was producing with *Tele Times* and put a bit of a commercial sheen on it. It was an immediate local hit. And for the next 15 years, from 1990 to 2004, we would annually publish the *Telegraph Avenue Street Calendar*. We got written up in all the local newspapers and the Dan Rather CBS News did a national feature on it. So Duncan began getting some long-overdue recognition.

"When I was the manager of Comic Relief in Berkeley, I used to see Duncan a lot," said Kristine. "Frankly, initially he gave me the creeps. A half-dozen conversations later and I was looking forward to his next visit. He was the first person to show me Dick Briefer Frankenstein and that alone puts him in the pantheon.

"Later, when he asked to borrow some money, I thought, 'Well, there's $10 I'll never see again,' and mainly was concerned that he wouldn't come by the store any more. He repaid me within a week. I regularly lent him money and always got it back, usually with a nice note on a xeroxed page of awesome cartoon art. What a sweetheart. He taught me not to judge people by their crusty tan corduroy jackets, and I'm grateful." (Watch out for most of those guys in crusty corduroy jackets. Duncan was the one-in-a-thousand exception to the rule.)

In a way, I thought that was the secret of why Duncan struck a chord with so many people. Duncan was so *obviously* weird. The rest of us are probably just as weird, we just try and hide it. And by the end of his life, Duncan's social circle included people from all walks of society, from successful lawyers and famed artists to bums on the street, and everyone in between.

Our working relationship was akin to Laurel & Hardy. Duncan was the skinny guy and he'd always screw up ("Gee, Ollie..."). And I was the fat guy and I'd always rage and bluster at Duncan ("This is another fine mess you got us into, Stanley!") and screw things up even worse. But we always forgave each other afterwards.

I used to say about our friendship: "Duncan, you're one of the few people strong enough to withstand me." After every joint success, no matter how great or small — whether it was producing yet another artistic masterpiece or merely scrounging up enough dough to buy the next pack of cigarettes — we'd always high-five and say: "Yet another successful Backwords and Duncan collaboration!"

His last few years were spent in failing health. Forty years of smoking and drinking had finally caught up to him (Basic 100s and Old English malt liquor, natch). In his last week they had him in the cancer ward at Alta Bates hospital. So I knew it was trouble.

I visited him for the last time a few weeks ago. As soon as I saw him, I knew it was just about over. I sat there in his hospital room and cried and cried. For 30 years, Duncan had always been out there on Telegraph Avenue whenever I was there. But now it hit me for the first time

See **Archetypal Weirdo Artist** *page 8*

HOMELESS & FEELING BLUE

by B.N. Duncan

A man can be weakened by
blows to his spirit,
Both imposed from without
and self-imposed.
We travel through life
in much darkness,
Now and then receiving
sparks and glows of our
richness within welling up.
A perverse part of the mind
seeks a "solution" to conflict, a
wrapping up of it all, by courting
downfall, courting disaster —
often leaving more of a mess.
The light in us remains
all the more precious
for often being covered up.
A man can forget his pride,
letting himself be like dead ashes,
neglecting his inner glossy essence,
himself being a creation in process.
A man can be weary while he
bears the embers of bright light.
He should not give up
before his time.

Democrats Join Republicans in Selling Out the Poor, Elderly, and Disabled In Budget Deal

As Gov. Schwarzenegger endangers poor children, the elderly and disabled by slashing services needed to preserve human life, too many Democrats have failed to protect the safety net.

Commentary by Lynda Carson

California's phony liberal Democrats have just helped to pass a Republican budget deal that shreds the state's safety net, by cutting $15.5 billion from the state's service sector to partially close a $26.3 billion funding shortfall in state revenues.

Among other cutbacks, the Democrats supported a $1.3 billion cut to MediCal, a $2.8 billion cut to the statewide university system, and a $6 billion cut to California's K-12 schools.

The Democratic leadership also supported the Republicans' push to slash three programs crucial to the well-being and survival of the poor, cutting $878 million or more from the children's health insurance program known as Healthy Families, In-Home Supportive Services and the CalWORKs program.

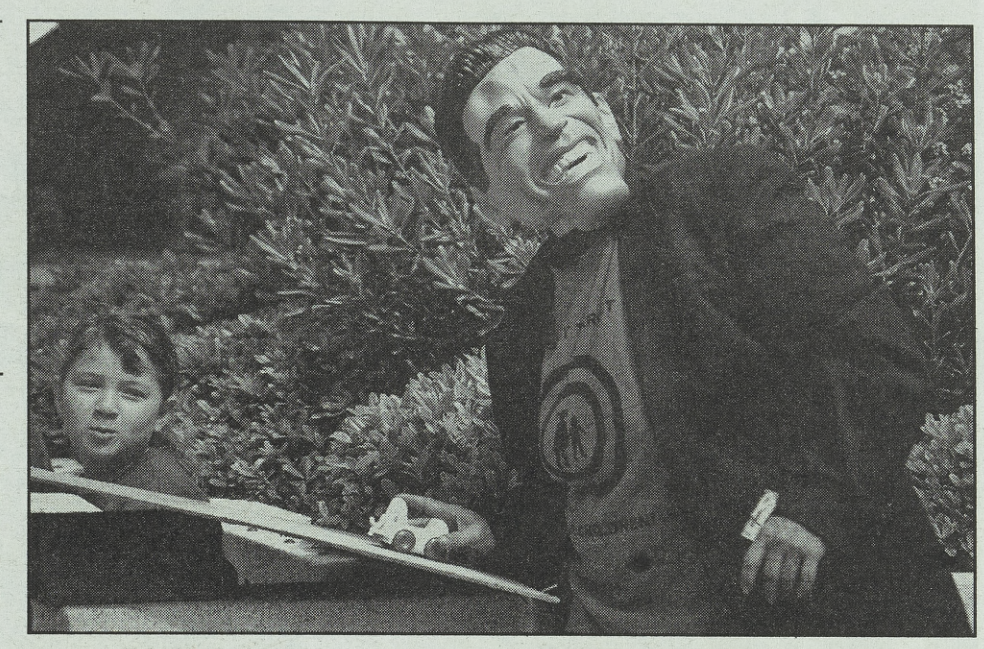
Rather than raising taxes on the rich and the major corporations that fail to pay their fair share of the tax burden, the Democrats chose to side with the Republicans and Terminator-turned-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in stealing precious resources meant to assist students, children, the sick, disabled, elderly, and the poor and working middle-class.

Meanwhile, Rep. Barbara Lee and other self-avowed liberals continue to remain silent about the budget-cutting process taking place in Sacramento, while the true extent of the attacks on the poor, elderly and disabled reaches new heights of deception and depravity.

During recent weeks, numerous calls made to Rep. Lee's office inquiring as to why the powerful congresswoman remains silent about the attack on California's safety net, have resulted in nothing more than a "no comment," coming from her staffers in Washington, including her local spokesperson Ricky Graham in Oakland. "California's budget crisis is a state issue, not a federal issue, and therefore Congresswoman Lee has no comment," said Graham.

Considering that Rep. Lee represents millions of people in the state of California, Graham's statement was totally lacking in credibility and humanity.

As California's Democratic leadership, including Assembly Speaker Karen Bass and Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, along with a total of 18 Democrat sell-outs who supported the Republican's attack on the safety net, try to conceal how much damage they have wrought upon the general public, hundreds of thousands of Californians will be hit hard in future months by the budget deal that protects the interests of the mighty rich, as it crushes the lives and interests of the working-class poor.



At an Oakland demonstration against the statewide budget cuts, Gov. Schwarzenegger, played by a protester wearing a mask, gloats over his draconian budget cuts to the safety net for children and poor people. Tom Lowe photo

Making matters worse for the elderly, disabled and poor, the Democratic leadership granted extreme new powers to the Republican minority by agreeing to proposals that do major damage to COLAs (cost of living increases) for poor citizens enrolled in CalWORKs, SSP and other areas of the state's safety net, by requiring that any new COLAs for the people in those programs must be approved by a two-thirds vote in future budgets.

At a small rally held on July 22 in front of Oakland City Hall, Eleanor Walden and her daughter Nasira publicly spoke out against the Republican budget-cutting proposals, along with Zachary Norris of "Books Not Bars," and Kevin D. Shields, the DSRP coordinator for the Disabled Students Program at the University of California, in Berkeley.

"The thought of the Democrats siding with the Republicans in the fascist proposals being passed to make the elderly and disabled get fingerprinted because of their participation in the In-Home Supportive Services Program, is enough to make my blood boil," said Eleanor Walden, a Berkeley scholar of 20th century American history and folklore.

"This is absolutely parallel to the fascism of Europe during the 1930s, in its broad attack on the elderly, disabled and poor, who are being scapegoated just as the Jews of Europe were in the '30s," Walden said. "They are turning citizens into aliens, and are trying to turn the elderly and disabled into criminals. I can bear witness to the damage being done to people in my generation by the horrific effects of the budget cuts taking place, and I further believe that we have become living targets of a fascist state."

Shields, DSRP Coordinator for disabled students, said, "By cutting the social services desperately needed by the disabled and elderly, you create a whole new class of citizens who become angry, frustrated and disillusioned about the system that was meant to assist them in their time of need."

Lydia Gans, a Food Not Bombs activist, said, "We already are seeing a huge increase in the homeless and hungry due to the effects of a bad economy, during our feeding times at People's Park. The nonprofits who usually help out are losing funding and donations, and this latest round of budget-cutting proposals will increase the level of homelessness and hunger all across the state. What should be happening is that everyone affected by the budget cuts should be in the streets of Sacramento and cities across the state to protest against the inhumanity and catastrophic effects that are taking place in everyday people's lives."

As proposed by state lawmakers, an additional $8 million in funding is slated to be slashed from the budget for state parks, on top of the $226 million in cuts to In-Home Supportive Services, plus $528 million from CalWORKS, including $124 million in cuts to the Healthy Families program that will negatively affect 930,000 low-income children.

Disabled SSI/SSP recipients have already taken a huge 6.4 percent cut from the state assistance program since February 2009, including the suspension of their cost-of-living increases that were promised to be paid back, after being grabbed by the governor. It will be nearly impossible to restore the cost-of-living increases now that the Democrats have caved in to the Republicans' requirement of a two-thirds majority vote to allow a cost-of-living adjustment in the future.

As the Democrats try to conceal the extent of the cutbacks and deceive the public about the true extent of damage they have done to California's safety net by siding with the Republicans in the unjust attack on children, the disabled, elderly and working class poor, additional budget cuts have also occurred.

On July 28, Gov. Schwarzenegger used the line item veto to slash another $1.1 billion dollars from the budget, furthering his agenda to balance the budget on the backs of the poor. Steinberg and Bass finally denounced these cutbacks as inhumane, harmful and possibly illegal

As part of the drastic reductions imposed on July 28, the governor announced an additional $37.5 million cutback from the In Home Support Services program that serves elderly, blind and disabled Californians.

In a direct attack on children and families, he cut an additional $50 million from Healthy Families, the health insurance program for children. He also made $50 million more in cuts to early childhood education services, and $80 million more in cuts to child welfare services. Schwarzenegger also slashed $52 million more from the Office of AIDS Prevention and Treatment program, and cut an additional $60.5 million from Medi-Cal.

With almost unbelievable disregard for the public welfare, the governor also eliminated funding of the program to help victims of domestic violence by chopping $16 million. Also, he slashed $50 million more in funding from the program that helps families who have babies with developmental disabilities.

Other cruel cutbacks by the governor include $375 million in cuts to employment, child care, and transportation services for welfare recipients who are working toward self-sufficiency, plus $124 million in cutbacks to counties serving California's abused and neglected children.

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Oakland's Master Plan to Displace the Poor

by Lynda Carson

A little-known document called the "Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement" gives an inside glimpse at Oakland's master plan to displace poor, African-American residents from the city. The document is dated December 12, 2007, and was approved by the West Oakland Project Area Committee (WOPAC),

WOPAC serves as an advisory board to the Oakland City Council on redevelopment matters for the West Oakland Redevelopment Project Area. It is made up of representatives from businesses, homeowners, community organizations and tenants.

WOPAC's operations are managed by Oakland's Redevelopment Division staff, and its operating expenses are paid from Redevelopment Agency funds and the West Oakland Base Reuse Organization.

The Oakland City Council established procedures for the formation of the West Oakland Project Area Committee on November 27, 2001. Extension approvals and funding by the City of Oakland are needed every year to keep WOPAC intact and to keep it from dissolving.

Interestingly, during a WOPAC committee meeting on December 10, 2008, a number of Oakland-based nonprofit housing organizations sought approval from WOPAC to obtain millions of dollars in funding for a number of major renovation projects in Oakland. The renovation projects proposed at several affordable housing complexes in the city may result in the displacement of hundreds of low-income renters from their rental housing. [See a full report in "Oakland's Renovation Plans May Displace Hundreds," *Street Spirit*, April 2009.]

One year before the December 2008 WOPAC meeting took place, a little-known statement called the Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement, which was approved by WOPAC in December 2007, was already circulating to people and agencies closely involved in housing development and renovation projects across the city.

The Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement — approved by WOPAC — contemptuously expresses an outright condemnation of Oakland's poor, African-American residents. The statement bluntly offers a graphic analysis of what city planning officials believe needs to be done to rid Oakland neighborhoods of low-income, African-American residents.

Sections of the Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement need to be quoted at length to give a full sense of the prejudice, disdain and scarcely concealed contempt that is displayed towards the poor, African-American residents of the West Oakland neighborhoods targeted by this document.

The vision statement strongly deplores the large numbers of African-Americans and jobless and impoverished people in the Hoover/West MacArthur area, and also denounces affordable housing. This city-approved statement states flatly that "the community is broken," thereby categorizing an entire race and economic class of people as broken-down impediments to progress. The document proposes using redevelopment strategies to "fix" the community by ridding the area of the poor people who reside in affordable housing. "To fix it, we need to disperse affordable housing," as the document asserts bluntly.

As you read the following quotations from the unsettling "vision for the future" approved by WOPAC, keep in mind that WOPAC is funded by and is an integral part of Oakland's municipal government.

"One of the earliest areas to be settled in Oakland, Hoover/West MacArthur was *largely working-class until the end of* World War II, when it was abandoned by those with financial means, cordoned off by freeways, and turned into a containment zone for the impoverished and unemployed. Businesses and jobs evaporated, while crime and blight took their place.

"The area became a containment zone for Oakland's social problems, providing housing of last resort. By 1990, the area was 81% black and overwhelmingly poor.

"Beat 6 is overconcentrated with public housing, containing over six percent of the City's OHA properties and over seven percent of available Section 8 rentals, even though Hoover/West MacArthur holds only 1.8% of the city's population. Beat 6 is also predominantly rental: 79%, according to the 2000 census. 73% of Section 8 renters are African-American, but only 35.7% of residents of the City of Oakland are African-American. The population of Beat 6 is 72% African-American.

"Absentee and Section 8 landlords can be identified via sustained perusal of public records. Buildings belonging to those landlords should be identified and monitored to ensure they meet applicable code standards. If and when they do not, the landlords should be contacted and appropriate steps taken to bring them into compliance, or to disqualify the property from participation in the Section 8 program.

"The community is broken. To fix it, we need to disperse affordable housing and increase homeownership. Our housing stock is a valuable city resource that has been left to decay. We need to attract residents with disposable income, who don't soak up social services, who can fix up the housing stock, who will in turn attract retail businesses.

"Redevelopment efforts, along with other public and private initiatives, should endeavor to transform the area back to what it was when first settled: a place where people want to live, rather than where conditions force them to live. *Public housing should be gradually dispersed* until the area shoulders no more than its fair share. Homeownership should be actively promoted, until the ratio of homeowners to renters is in sync with the citywide average. Housing should again be oriented toward the working class, rather than the idle class. Schools should partner with Bay Area industries to provide realistic, forward-looking job training for area residents that will result in long-term employment at living wages. Neighborhood-serving retail should be pursued. City services and amenities should mirror those enjoyed by other Oakland neighborhoods."

The West Oakland Project Area Committee approved of the above statements, and wants to bring Oakland and its West MacArthur neighborhoods back to what it was like towards the end of World War II.

Seeing how WOPAC recently has been approving millions in funding for major renovation projects at low-income housing sites that will displace hundreds of low-income renters from their housing, poor people have a good reason to be very concerned about what is being done in their name.

City officials may talk a good game about Oakland's wonderful eviction protections under Just Cause, but when it comes down to it, Oakland officials, local nonprofit housing organizations and the Oakland Housing Authority will violate the rights of Oakland's poor tenants in a heartbeat, if there is a profit to be made, and African-Americans can be displaced in the process.

Just ask the low-income renters at the historic California Hotel why they filed a $53 million claim on August 6, 2008, against the City of Oakland and a few city officials, including Oakland housing officials Marge Gladman and Sean Rogan.

There is no room for the poor in Oakland according to the "Vision for the Future" that was approved by WOPAC, and when nonprofit housing groups have to go before the City and WOPAC to seek funding for their renovation projects, it does not bode well for Oakland's poor residents.

The Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement approved by WOPAC complains that there are too many poor African-Americans residing in the West MacArthur neighborhood of Oakland, and that there is too much poverty, unemployment and crime. As a result, the statement promotes a clear vision in which low-income African-American renters in affordable housing across Oakland are to be dispersed and displaced.

In 2004, according to a housing profile report compiled by officials, "In Oakland, out of the approximately 150,000 units of housing, 21,654 are under some sort of public subsidy (Oakland Housing Authority)."

The report also stated, "There are three types of affordable housing in Oakland. First, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) manages a program called Section 8 which provides a variety of types of assistance to low-income residents. The main type of assistance is housing vouchers, which pay for a portion of rent in privately owned units. There are 11,142 Section 8 units in Oakland. The second group of units are the 3,308 units owned by the Oakland Housing Authority, which runs its own subsidy program that is supported by federal money. The last type of units are the publicly-assisted rental units developed under the City of Oakland's Community Economic Development Agency (CEDA). CEDA provides subsidies to developers to build affordable housing units, which are then rented to low-income tenants."

The WOPAC document contends that low-income housing sites in Oakland need

See **A Master Plan** *page 5*



Low-income tenants of the California Hotel protested their threatened eviction by a nonprofit landlord. Lydia Gans photo

The Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement deplores the large numbers of African-Americans and poor and jobless people in the area, and also denounces affordable housing. This city-approved statement states flatly that "the community is broken," thereby categorizing an entire race and class of people as broken-down impediments to progress. It proposes to "fix" the community by ridding the area of poor people who reside in affordable housing.

A Master Plan to Displace the Poor

from page 4

to be specially monitored, because they are full of African-Americans.

In March 2009, the Oakland City Council and its Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA) approved around $10 million in funding for major renovation projects all across the City at numerous low-income housing sites. The renovation plans may displace 500 to 600 low-income families from their housing once these projects are fully under way.

WOPAC was one of the committees that nonprofit housing organizations, including East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) and Resources for Community Development (RCD), went to recently when seeking approval for millions in funding to renovate affordable housing sites filled with low-income African-American families.

Low-income tenants are at risk of being displaced from their housing in future months at the following low-income housing sites: Marin Way Court (20 units), Eldridge Gonaway Commons (40 units), Slim Jenkins Court (32 units), Drachma Housing (14 units), Hugh Taylor House (43 units), Oakland Point (9 buildings for low-income renters), Effie's House (20 units), Casa Velasco and Posada de Colores (100 residents) and Marcus Garvey Commons (22 family townhouses).

There are a number of other low-income housing OCHI sites currently at risk of major renovations across Oakland, when funding becomes available.

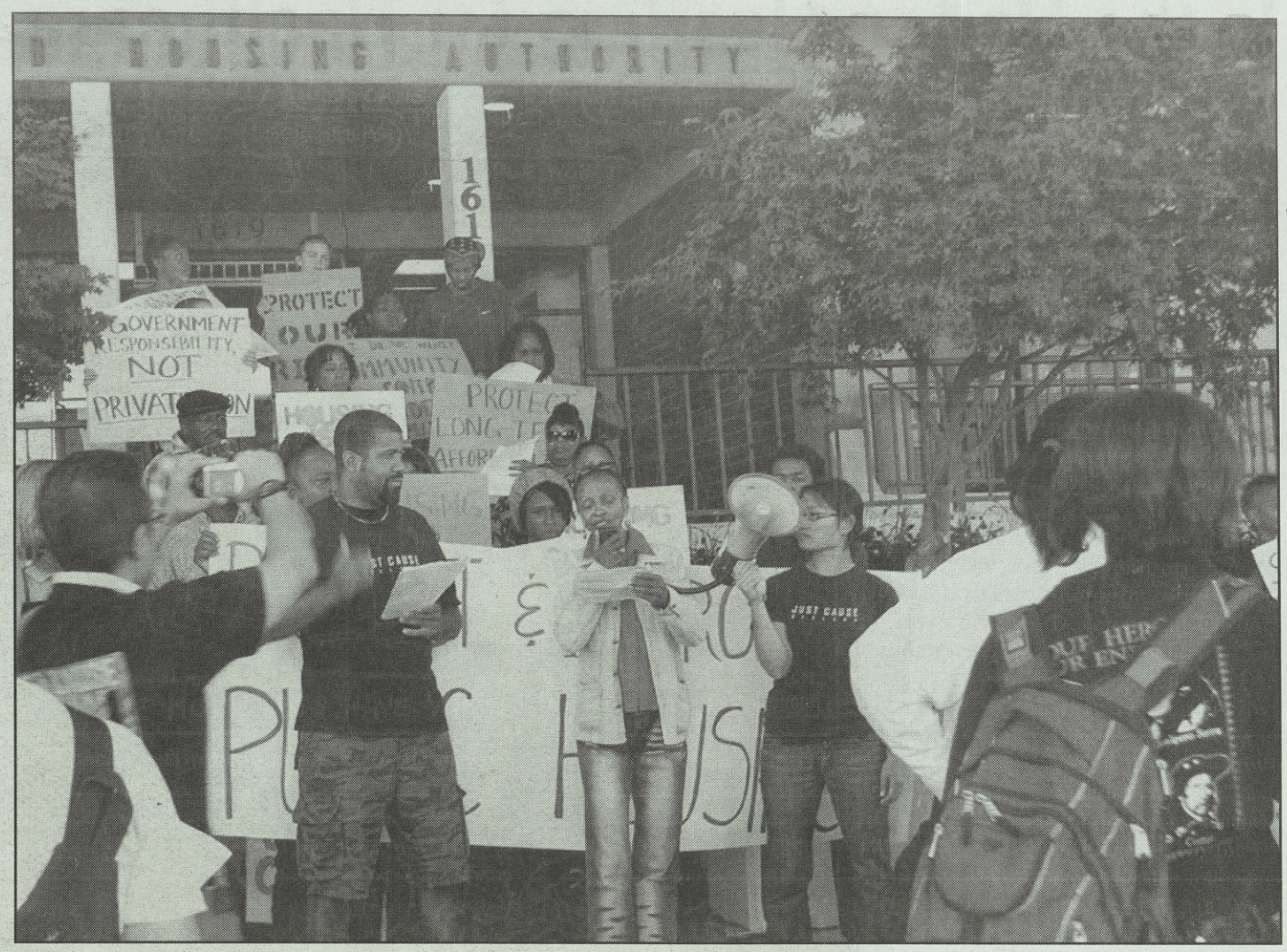
Other notable events taking place in the city also carry a warning that Oakland's low-income renters are at risk of being displaced from their housing, and that a master plan to displace Oakland's poor is in effect.

As an example, in February 2007, the City of Oakland sued the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA), complaining of unsafe living conditions and code violations at their low-income housing sites after the OHA spent years of being starved of desperately needed funding for capital improvements at all of their affordable housing sites.

The City of Oakland claimed: "At the time of the lawsuit, more than 1,600 OHA apartment units were located at hundreds of 'scattered sites' throughout the city that did not have on-site managers. Lack of management helped to create a condition of unabated criminal activity (including drug sales and prostitution) at some sites. Also, OHA's failure to maintain and repair its buildings led to numerous housing code violations, unsafe living spaces, accumulation of garbage and other problems."

This attack on Oakland's poor was resolved in October 2008, but only after the Oakland Housing Authority reached an agreement with city officials in which the OHA actually agreed to dispose of 1,600 occupied low-income public housing units. The OHA has applied to HUD for permission to dispose of the 1,600 occupied rental units at scattered sites across the city, and plans to sell the scattered housing sites for as little as one dollar per parcel to some of their favored nonprofit housing organizations.

Some of the nonprofit housing groups may already be in partnership with the OHA on projects that have already displaced many of Oakland's low-income African-American families. The East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation is in partnership with the OHA at Lion Creek Crossings, formerly known as the Coliseum Gardens, a public housing complex with 178 units in East Oakland.



Protesters gather at the Oakland Housing Authority to denounce plans to sell off public housing units. Lydia Gans photo

Bridge Housing has a partnership with the OHA in several Hope VI projects that in recent years have resulted in the displacement of many low-income African-American families from public housing units across Oakland.

In addition, a number of reports released by the City of Oakland in July 2009 reveal that Oakland officials are contemplating the demolition of housing units formerly managed by Oakland Community Housing, Inc (OCHI), a nonprofit agency that managed several hundred affordable housing units until it ran into disastrous financial problems, causing a feud between OCHI and city officials.

One report reveals that if the City of Oakland cannot get its hands on OCHI's numerous low-income housing sites, or cannot transfer the properties into the hands of other trusted agencies, city officials would rather see the affordable housing sites demolished and the low-income families displaced, rather than allowing the properties to fall into the hands of unwanted entities.

The battle at Oakland's historic California Hotel in 2008, which still continues to this day, brought much media attention to the feud between the City of Oakland and their former partner, OCHI, which owned and managed the hotel. The plight of the long-term, low-income renters at the historic hotel who bravely fought against their illegal evictions, is still uncertain to this day.

The struggle of California Hotel tenants against their unlawful evictions resulted in an injunction that stopped the City of Oakland from displacing 73 tenants. The California Hotel was a permanent housing site that offered Just Cause eviction protections. Yet, the eviction protections granted to the low-income renters by Oakland's voters in 2002 were violated by OCHI, the City of Oakland, EBALDC and other entities who were involved in the attempt to transform the historic hotel into transitional housing. This was done despite the fact that the Just Cause ordinance is written in such a way that the City of Oakland is required to enforce its eviction protections.

The injunction halted the evictions of the low-income African-American renters, and the judge appointed Anne Omura, executive director of the Oakland-based Eviction Defense Center, as the Trustee of the California Hotel, giving her the responsibility of operating the hotel on behalf of the tenants.

On July 20, 2009, Steve Perelson, an attorney representing the tenants at the California Hotel, said, "It's a matter of economics. There's not enough money coming in to run the California Hotel, and the City of Oakland and OCHI got out from under it. Since Anne Omura of the Eviction Defense Center was appointed last fall as a Trustee for the courts to operate and manage the California Hotel, she and attorney John Murcko have spent as much as $20,000 or more of their own money to keep the hotel open for the tenants. Anne Omura does not get paid as a Trustee of the court to manage the California Hotel.

"OCHI has gone belly up, with no one left in the organization to manage OCHI's properties, including the California Hotel. It is our hope that the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation will be able to take over the hotel, and still keep the current low-income tenants in place with low rents."

At present, serious forces are at play against the poorest citizens, including the City of Oakland's Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement, the Oakland Housing Authority, HUD, certain nonprofit housing organizations, the governor of California, the federal government, banks, real estate investment firms, lending institutions, elected officials in the Democrat and Republican parties who just passed the severe budgetary cutbacks that have decimated the safety net, and various other entities involved in diverting funds from the poorest of the poor, in an effort to displace the poor from their affordable housing communities.

The Hoover/West MacArthur Vision Statement that was approved by the West Oakland Project Area Committee (WOPAC), uses inflammatory language to incite hostility and fear towards poor people, homeless people and recyclers: "Urban miners are a routine sight, their stolen shopping carts piled high with cans and bottles filched from recycling bins that residents pay Waste Management to empty. Empty homes are at risk for break-ins by thieves who will strip out copper pipe and wire to sell to local recycling businesses. The police rarely investigate property losses, which are treated as insurance claims."

There is no mention in this statement approved by WOPAC as to how the major banks, including Wells Fargo and other large lending institutions, have raped, pillaged and ruined this country's economy, and created the massive number of home foreclosures taking place all across Oakland and the entire nation.

Instead, WOPAC would rather wage their war against poor African-American tenants, because there is big money to be made in displacing the poor, and Oakland is knee deep in various schemes to remove the poor from their affordable housing sites.

The war against the poor is going ahead full steam, and is moving its way up the economic ladder against working people and the middle class, as evidenced by the budget battles taking place in the California legislature and the back rooms of the governor's office.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

drop your heads and weep

by Judy Jones

please drop your heads
and weep
for the homeless
found frozen
all over the streets

while we laid
in our cozy little beds
all warm and fed
with dollar signs
dancin thru our heads

who will hear
our own
blood curdling screams
as we are freezing to death
on the streets

will anyone leave
their warm little beds
to claim our no-name bodies
at the city's morgues doors

oh people
please drop your heads
and weep
and weep
and weep
for the homeless
found frozen
all over the streets

Is the Nation Heading for Healthcare Apartheid?

The latest proposals may lock in major inequality in access to healthcare

Healthcare is a human right. And a human right should not be contingent on ability to pay. Nor should it be divided into "basic, enhanced and premium."



Unequal healthcare may provide second-class care for some U.S. citizens. *"Willis Avenue Bridge."* Tempera by Ben Shahn, 1940

by Norman Solomon

"I want to cover everybody," President Obama said at his news conference on healthcare proposals. "Now, the truth is that unless you have a — what's called a single-payer system, in which everybody's automatically covered, then you're probably not going to reach every single individual..."

The same conventional wisdom keeping single-payer healthcare off Washington's table has been spinning for various "reform" plans with such accelerated RPMs that at this point the nation's "healthcare debate" is suffering from a severe case of vertigo.

"The overwhelming majority of Americans want healthcare, but millions of them can't afford it," Obama told the assembled journalists. "So the plan that has been — that I've put forward and that — what we're seeing in Congress would cover, the estimates are, at least 97 to 98 percent of Americans. There might still be people left out there who, even though there's an individual mandate, even though they are required to purchase health insurance, might still not get it, or despite a lot of subsidies, are still in such dire straits that it's still hard for them to afford it. And we may end up giving them some sort of hardship exemption."

That may sound good. But it's in the service of an agenda for "healthcare reform" that's seriously flawed.

Unequal levels of coverage

Days ago, buried in a chart under the headline "How the Health Care Bills Compare," the *New York Times* provided some cogent yet cryptic information in the category of "Public Plan."

A key Senate committee had just approved a bill with a public plan that would "compete with private insurers," the *Times* chart explained on July 18. The public plan "would provide 'only the essential health benefits,' as defined by the bill, 'except in states that offer additional benefits.'"

Meanwhile, the newspaper noted, "Democrats from three House committees are working on a single plan." Under that plan, "Different levels of coverage — 'basic, enhanced and premium' — can be offered through the public option."

Those few grainy sentences, quickly swept beneath the waves from oceans of media, referred to a disturbing aspect of "public plan" scenarios. If the ostensible goal is healthcare for all, then — at best — some of the "all" would end up being much more equal than others.

The Republican Party is coming from such a right-wing place that any government action to improve healthcare access is ideologically unacceptable. In contrast, the broad outlines of a Democratic "public plan" at least embrace the precept that the not-so-tender-mercies of the market are insufficient to fully provide for the population's medical needs.

But as a practical matter, a "public plan" coexisting with the private health insurance system — generally touted by U.S. media as the pole of real options farthest from the Republican "free market" fixation — is inherently reconciled to major inequality in access to healthcare.

Even while straining to put forward a "public option" as some sort of stunning government intervention to level the healthcare playing field, media coverage rarely comes to terms with the situation that would actually remain under such a scenario.

How does "healthcare apartheid" strike you?

For the government to offer the public a multi-tier set of options for health insurance — in the words of the *New York Times,* "different levels of coverage" such as "basic, enhanced and premium" — is to imitate the approach of the corporate healthcare establishment.

After all, isn't it implicit that the government plan's "different levels of coverage," offered to the public, would be based on ability to pay?

Healthcare is a human right

Missing from the dominant healthcare debate — not only along Pennsylvania Avenue but also along media row — is a principle that could be debated and should be debated.

In a few words: Healthcare is a human right. And a human right should not be contingent on ability to pay. Nor should it be divided into "basic, enhanced and premium."

Media accounts keep telling us that the current political debate on healthcare is unprecedented and groundbreaking. But an article in the latest edition of the *Columbia Journalism Review,* by seasoned healthcare reporter Trudy Lieberman, makes a convincing case that little has changed within the frames of media parameters.

The press "has mostly passed along the pronouncements of politicians and the major stakeholders who have the most to lose from wholesale reform," Lieberman writes. "By not challenging the status quo, the press has so far foreclosed a vibrant discussion of the full range of options, and also has not dug deeply into the few that are being discussed, thereby leaving citizens largely uninformed about an issue that will affect us all."

What we're seeing now is a slightly freshened version of a timeworn tap dance that ranges across a constricted media stage. As Lieberman notes: "Absent from the debate are not only single-payer systems like the ones in England and Canada, but other systems with multiple payers, like ones in Germany and Japan — or, for that matter, any discussion of why a system that relies on competition among private insurers in The Netherlands hasn't resulted in lower prices for consumers, as advocates claimed."

The variety of healthcare delivery systems abroad, in industrialized countries, spans a common assumption — healthcare as a human right — an assumption that doesn't cut the mass-media mustard in the United States.

Stakeholder profits stifle the healthcare debate

"What's common to all these systems," Lieberman points out, "is that everyone is entitled to healthcare and pays taxes to support the system, and medical costs are controlled by limits on spending. The specter of a system that takes a significant bite out of stakeholder profits in the U.S. is the real reason the debate is so restricted."

As Trudy Lieberman puts it, "Reform efforts have danced around this impasse for decades."

That helps to explain why so much media coverage of healthcare reform proposals is apt to be so baffling to most readers, listeners and viewers. When the big elephant (or, if you will, donkey) in the national newsroom is dependent on the insurance, pharmaceutical and hospital industries for financing, there's a distinct shortage of candor about the consequences of such ongoing intrusions. Newsgathering, media debate — and, of course, healthcare — suffer the consequences.

In the mid-1960s, Medicare became law with the stroke of a presidential pen. Lyndon Johnson was able to sign the measure despite a huge onslaught of opposition from right-wing politicians, their corporate backers and professional groups like the American Medical Association.

These days, the AMA may be somewhat more circumspect in its continuing opposition to progressive measures, but the overall balance of political power remains heavily tilted against healthcare for all.

Big Medicine contributes heavily to Sen. Max Baucus

"In the Senate," columnist Gail Collins noted in the July 23 *New York Times,* "everyone is waiting on Max Baucus of Montana. Nothing is going to happen on health care without the approval of Baucus," the chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

As the *Washington Post* reported days ago, he "has emerged as a leading recipient of Senate campaign contributions from the hospitals, insurers and other medical interest groups hoping to shape the legislation to their advantage. Health-related companies and their employees gave Baucus's political committees nearly $1.5 million in 2007 and 2008."

Today, the kind of arguments heard during the early 1960s against guaranteed healthcare for the elderly can now be heard against establishing a comprehensive single-payer system — also known as Medicare for all. But now, the healthcare debate is trapped between a political establishment that doesn't want a single-payer system and news media that insist on ignoring its real potential.

Norman Solomon is national co-chair of the Healthcare NOT Warfare campaign. He is the author of *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death,* which has been made into a documentary film.

Morning Flag Aloft

by Claire J. Baker

At VA Clinic, veterans
limp, cane, crutch,
wheelchair by to memories
and back again, while

under the flag pole
blood-red roses grow
in neat rows
like gravestones.

Minimum Wage Stuck in the 1950s

by Holly Sklar

Are you better off than you were 40 years ago? Not if you're a minimum wage worker.

It would take a wage of $9.92 an hour today to match the buying power of the minimum wage at its peak in 1968, the year Martin Luther King died fighting for living wages for sanitation workers.

In today's dollars, the 1968 hourly minimum wage adds up to $20,634 a year working full time. The new federal minimum wage of $7.25 comes to just $15,080 a year. That's $ 5,554 in lost wages.

"It is criminal to have people working on a full-time basis... getting part-time income," King told workers in Memphis, Tenn., days before his murder. King said, "We are tired of working our hands off and laboring every day and not even making a wage adequate with daily basic necessities of life."

Imagine what King would say today.

The minimum wage is stuck in the 1950s. With the raise, the minimum wage is higher than 1950's inflation-adjusted $6.71, but lower than the 1956 minimum wage of $7.93 in today's dollars.

The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

The federal minimum wage was not enacted during good times, but during the extraordinarily hard times of the Great Depression. When the minimum wage became law in 1938, one out of five workers was unemployed and job creation was crucial.

President Franklin Roosevelt called the minimum wage "an essential part of economic recovery." Roosevelt said, millions of workers "receive pay so low that they have little buying power. Aside from the undoubted fact that they thereby suffer great human hardship, they are unable to buy adequate food and shelter, to maintain health or to buy their share of manufactured goods."

Roosevelt said, "The increase of national purchasing power [is] an underlying necessity of the day." And so it is today.

Camille Moran, owner of a Louisiana Christmas tree farm and paralegal service, says, "A minimum wage increase could be the most important factor in powering our economy out of the recession."

Consumer spending makes up about 70 percent of our economy. The minimum wage sets the wage floor.

We can't build a strong economy on poverty wages.

A growing share of workers make too little to buy necessities — much less afford a middle-class standard of living.

A growing share of business revenue has gone to executive pay and profits.

In 1968, the richest 1 percent of Americans had 11 percent of national income. By 2006, they had 23 percent — the highest share since 1928, right before the Great Depression.

We can't build a strong, sustainable economy on a 1950s' wage floor, 1920s' income gaps and ballooning Wall Street bailouts.

U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce CEO Margot Dorfman said, "Now, more than ever, it's imperative employees are paid a fair minimum wage. It is an unsustainable and dangerous downward spiral to push American workers into poverty and expect taxpayers to pick up the bill for the consequences."

Dorfman is among 1,000 national business leaders and small business owners supporting the minimum wage increase in a statement at www.businessforafairminimumwage.org.

"Anyone who thinks the minimum wage shouldn't be raised should try living on it," said Phillip Rubin, CEO of Computer Software for Professionals in Oakland, Calif.

Michael Shuman, public policy director at the fast-growing Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, said, "Raising the minimum wage to $7.25 is an overdue step in providing a decent, fair livelihood to American workers and creating a truly 'living economy.'"

If the minimum wage had stayed above the nearly $10 value it had in 1968, it would have put upward pressure — rather than downward pressure — on the average worker wage.

The Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, which I advise, is calling for a minimum wage of $10 in 2010. It's time to break the cycle of too little, too late raises.

"A fair minimum wage protects the middle class and gives entry-level workers some economic breathing room," said Lew Prince, co-owner of Vintage Vinyl in St. Louis, Mo. "Rebuilding our economy starts with showing hard-working Americans that their work will be rewarded."

Holly Sklar is author of *Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times* (www.letjusticeroll.org) and *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All of Us*. She can be reached at hsklar@aol.com.



"6th Street" Art by Jonathan Burstein

"Now, more than ever, it's imperative employees are paid a fair minimum wage. It is an unsustainable and dangerous downward spiral to push American workers into poverty and expect taxpayers to pick up the bill for the consequences." — U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce CEO Margot Dorfman

RUNAWAY

by George Wynn

Here in the late day
chill she feels as quiet
as her sleeping old men-friends
on the rotting pier

The sound of seagulls
cawing with no
beginning and no
end help swallow
her loss and remind
her of mother's ashes
in San Francisco Bay

Street Person I Don't Know

by Claire J. Baker

I spot your still, prone shape,
small but formidable.
I imagine you dead.
Then your wings flutter.
Now you are a live man
or a shaggy angel. Up here

at my church on a hill
men are cutting down
sun-blocking pines.
Stumps bleed fresh sap --
trees wanting still to live.
But now it's too late.

My thoughts go blank & sad.
I miss their shaggy green
in the vacant sky.
Mister Way Down There,
when will you stop falling,
when, please, will you fly?

Bad Money

by George Wynn

The night is long
for the Polish widow
in the retirement hotel
she lost half
of what little she had
what to do
at this late hour?
choke her broker —
it's good to joke
window open
listening to the
passing shower
across the way
a song about dead flowers
gives her a headache
she prefers Chopin

At her desk
she dusts off her 1928
copy of G.B. Shaw's
Intelligent Woman's Guide
To Socialism and Capitalism
she turns to the first page
ah, what's the use?
these days
it's all bad money
any illusions of trust
in the business world
gone with the wind
she gazes in the mirror
"look at me now
a withered ballerina
who can't go anywhere
without a walker
ah, self pity is not for me"

She takes a lukewarm bath
says a Catholic
prayer
types out her will
takes a sleeping pill
... then another

Big City Blues

by George Wynn

Finally got a job
and a place to stay
never mind — everybody
in the dump — either
a blank face or
a hostile look

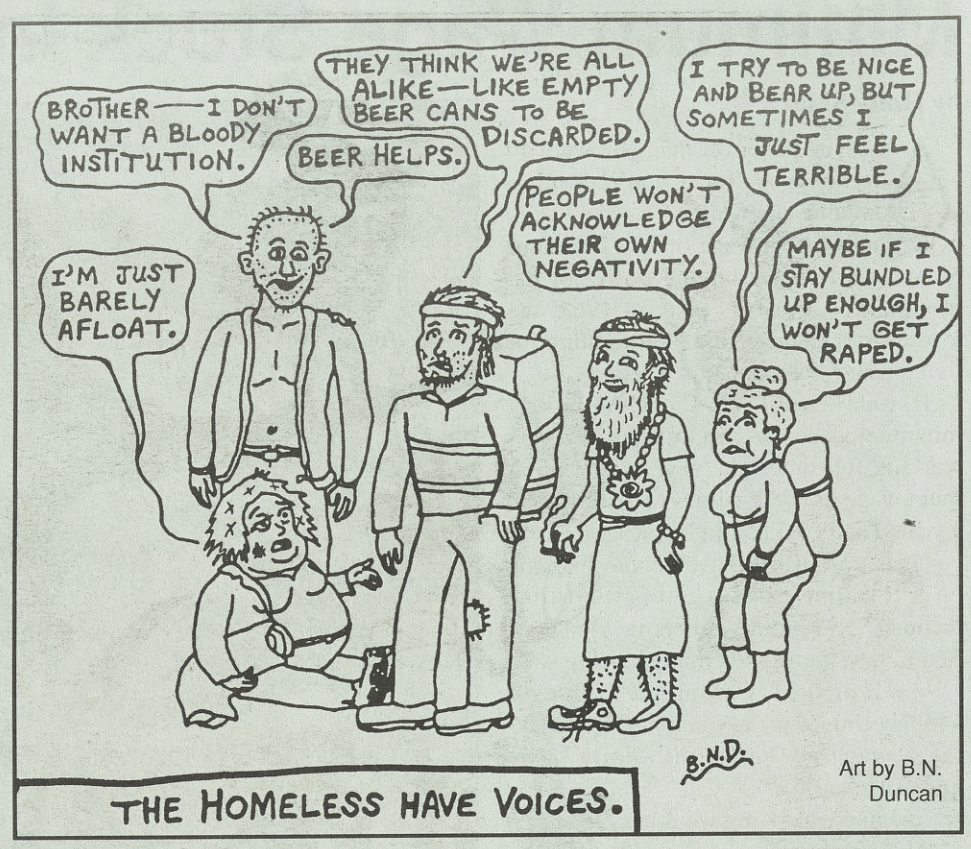
way past midnight
in Baghdad by the Bay
he's listening to the little
red radio
familiar blues/country
songs: lovers split up
drift far apart
drown themselves in
the bottle to
ease their broken heart

he's really fighting
the urge
he wills himself:
"just let the whiskey bottle
on top of the radio
sit capped for
5 minutes."
his brain has
not been his
friend of late
his knuckles turn white
it's been a 1/2 hr.
now. he's turning
in

before he drifts
off to a hard sleep
his heart drifts
back to Ohio
and the family
and the farm
never mind — divorce
and the band
wiped out
the only stable
structure he
ever knew



Renowned underground cartoonist R. Crumb *(left)* with B.N. Duncan in Berkeley.



Art by B.N. Duncan

B.N. Duncan's artworks gave a voice to the voiceless, and depicted their humanity.



Art by B.N. Duncan

The Archetypal Weirdo Artist

An incredible rainbow arched all the way across the far end of People's Park. I figured this was Duncan's way of saying goodbye to the Telegraph scene he so loved before he headed off to the cosmos.

from page 2

that he would never be out there again.

I went from giving him pep-talks about "Hang in there! Hang in there!" to "Let it go! Let it go!" You know? "God loves you, and you're going to heaven." And all that crap.

But while I sobbed and wept, Duncan laid there on his hospital bed and he was stoic the whole time. He always admired tough guys. I always thought he was doing Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney in his head. ("I never met a dame who didn't understand a good slap in the face!")

In a way, that was the secret of our artistic chemistry. I supplied the emotional and Duncan supplied the intellectual, though in truth, we both had plenty of both sides. Duncan was no cold-blooded intellectual; he had plenty of heart. And I could talk a line of intellectual b.s. with the best of them, in between my emotional tantrums. But we were both strong where the other was weak.

Duncan was like an anthropologist of the gutter. He studied the Berkeley street people, and all of life, like a scientist would study an exotic tribe in New Guinea. He would place his latest artistic specimen under his microscope and study it, as if looking for clues. He'd hold the slide up to the light and say to himself: "Hmmm. Now what does *this* tell me about this cock-eyed human life of ours?"

Everything Duncan did was weird and unique. For years he carried his stuff around with him everywhere he went in this big, bulky cardboard box. For years I tried to get him to switch over to the more practical backpack. To which he said: "I don't want to learn how to use a backpack." I said: "Duncan, backpacks don't come with instructionals."

But that was Duncan. Finally in his last years, he got too weak to carry his box, so he did switch over to a backpack. Which he carried around with him everywhere, cradled in his arms, just like he used to carry his box. "Duncan logic," I called it.

He was such a unique and oddball character, everybody on the scene imitated Duncan and repeated his many catchphrases: "Feel free to look at anything you like!"... "Uh, you couldn't loan me a few bucks until the first?"... "What she needs is a damn good spanking!" And my favorite: "Life is basically good."

For Duncan was a guy who had every good reason to turn into a bitter cynic and yet, in spite of it all, in spite of all the hardships, sufferings and disappointments he endured, he still believed that life was, if not great, at least a darn good thing in its essence.

Duncan was one of the most relentlessly creative people I've ever met. For the 30 years that I knew him, he was constantly working on a new artistic project. And unlike so many artists, when he got an idea, he almost always saw it through from beginning to completion.

Even on his death-bed, when he could barely speak, gasping and hacking for air, Duncan talked excitedly about three different publications that would be publishing his work: "I'm gonna get a review in the next issue of *Mineshaft*. Claire Burch is putting out a book of my writing from *Street Spirit*. And Terri Compost is going to publish some of my photos and drawings in a book about People's Park!"

And his last words to me before he drifted off into a fog of morphine were: "Every day is a triumph!"

Unearthing Duncan's archives

B.N. Duncan's sister Elaine and I were stuck with the monumental task of wading through his storage locker of possessions. Hundreds and hundreds of boxes haphazardly stacked to the ceiling in this 8-foot-by-8-foot locker. Duncan was so nuts, he saved *everything*. Bank statements and rent receipts from 1978, and old coffee cups, crammed in amongst priceless original artwork and original R. Crumb letters.

The plan was to whittle the stuff down to about 50 boxes of treasures. Duncan's life's work. Then the Ohio State University Cartoon Museum was paying to have it all shipped back to Ohio. After a lifetime of being vaguely bitter about being ignored by the academic world, Duncan was finally finding a place in a prestigious university.

It was a mind-boggling trip to wade through the Duncan archives. This mountain of creativity. Forty years of cartoons and writing and photos and sculptures and correspondences and publications (as well as thousands of spanking mags, but that's another story). Some of his work struck me as mundane and pedantic. But the best of it (in my opinion) was touched by pure genius. Pure originality. And face it, a lot of real life is mundane and pedantic. And Duncan rarely went for the sensational. He always went for the real. Which is why his work had legs and will live on.

I couldn't resist going through all of his photos one last time. There were 10 big boxes of them, and I spent 12 hours, non-stop, going through every one. One last trip down memory lane. It was like watching a movie of my life in fast-speed, as 30 years of my life rushed by my eyes. Watching myself go from a young man to an old man. I realized Duncan had not only documented his own life, but he had documented my life as well.

And he had documented the life of the whole Telegraph Avenue scene over the last 30 years. Such was the breadth of his artistic vision. I couldn't help thinking: "Thirty years. How did it go by so fast? In a blink of an eye." And, of course, in the very last batch of photos, there was a shot of Duncan waving goodbye.

Now, I've always believed that when a person dies, their soul lingers very strongly for two weeks in the area where they lived. And for two weeks, the soul has the power to manipulate the action a bit, to bless their friends and tweak their enemies, before the soul finally disperses into the universal. Its a concept that's often mentioned in Hindu scripture.

Anyways, it was Saturday, exactly two weeks after Duncan had died, and Elaine and I had been hacking away at his mountain of possessions for three days non-stop and hadn't even reached the far wall of the storage locker. We were standing outside in the courtyard of the storage place when Duncan's sister — who's kind of psychic — said: "We'd better pack up for the day because I think its going to rain."

I remember thinking: "That's ridiculous! It's not going to rain in July!" And yet, a couple hours later, I was walking up Dwight Way towards People's Park and it did in fact start raining. And I looked up in the sky and there was an incredible rainbow that arched all the way across the far end of People's Park.

So I figured this was Duncan's way of saying goodbye to the Telegraph scene he so loved before he headed off to the cosmos. As I stood there in People's Park staring up at the rainbow, I looked behind me, and on the bulletin board at exactly the middle of the rainbow was a copy of the *Oakland Tribune* article about Duncan's memorial, with a big photo of Duncan seemingly staring up at the rainbow.

If you wrote up something like that in a novel, nobody would believe it. But real life is weirder than any novel, ain't it?

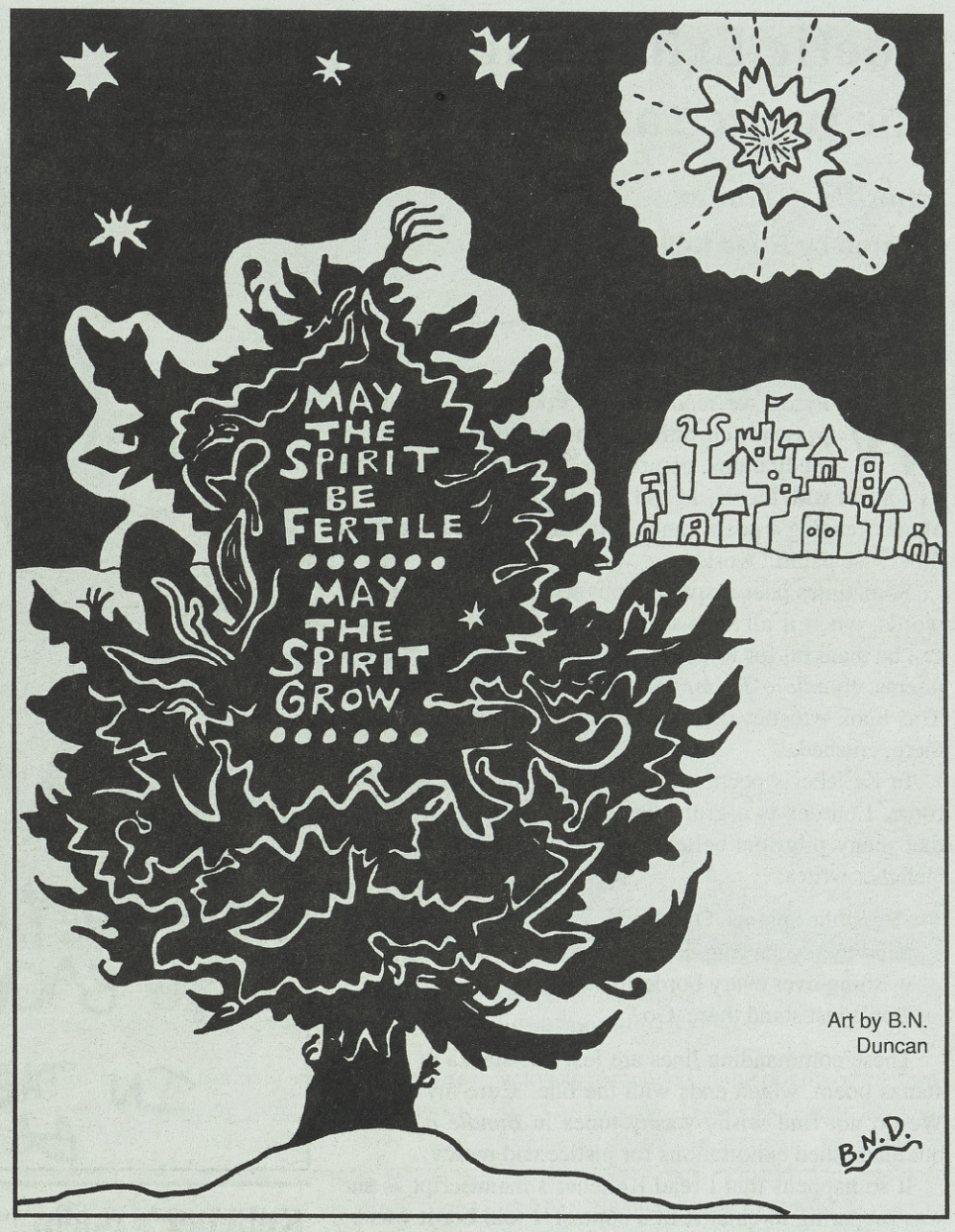
I went back to Telegraph where Moe's Books was celebrating its 50th anniversary, and there was a band playing inside and free coffee and cake. There was a festive, party atmosphere everywhere on the Ave.

Then I staggered up to my homeless campsite in the Berkeley hills, and there was a band playing at the Greek Theatre. This celestial music wafted out into the night air, some pop song I recognized from the radio about dissolving into the atmosphere.

This cute young chick rushed up to me and asked if I knew where the parking lot was, she was looking for her car. I was no help, but I asked her who the band was. "Death Cab for Cuties," she said. And it was perfect. For that cute old guy B.N. Duncan was saying goodbye before he took his death cab to the heavens.



Art by B.N. Duncan



Art by B.N. Duncan

"May The Spirit Be Fertile. May The Spirit Grow." **Even while living on the tough, stark streets of the city, B.N. Duncan often created scenes of natural beauty.**

'Berkeley's Low-Rent Answer to William Burroughs'

Editor's Note: Berkeley artist Richard List wrote this appreciative overview of B.N. Duncan's artistry and personal style for *Street Spirit* a few years ago. In the wake of Duncan's death in late June, List's article now stands as an insightful testimony as to why so many artists, acquaintances and street people held Duncan in such high esteem.

List quotes one of Duncan's characteristic sayings — words which now seem, in retrospect, to say so much about Duncan himself: *"Our society has a way of excluding people, so sometimes truly creative people end up on the edge."*

by Richard List

Wild Billy Wolf, who co-founded the *TELE TIMES* street journal with B.N. Duncan, has said that Duncan is "Berkeley's low-rent, eccentric and down-at-the-heel answer to William Burroughs."

Willy Lizarraga wrote in the *Bay Guardian,* that Duncan is "like a forgotten master of ceremonies or a down-and-out Don Quixote" on a Telegraph Avenue street corner. Lizarraga mentions Duncan's friendship with legendary underground artist R. Crumb, and quotes Crumb praising Duncan's eccentric work. "You're a significant artist in this time," Crumb wrote. "Your work will live on in posterity... that is certain."

Duncan has an uncanny intuition. Time and time again I will discuss universal human problems with him, and he will bring up certain unique viewpoints that mysteriously seem to be very appropriate. It is amazing. Thoughts, images, or questions pop into my mind as we talk; I frequently am moved to record him or take notes, so as not to lose his intuitive glimpses.

Duncan has definitely had a "calling" or callings. He is exceptional in a number of ways. He is a "street anthropologist," with many creative, unusual, and very true insights to offer about women, men, group behavior, peace, the police, work, etc. When Duncan fulfills his "callings," he is in some sort of timeless place.

"Undeservedly you will atone for the sins of your fathers," wrote Horace. Whatever those sins were, in Duncan's case they must have been very strong. Talk about being bent out of shape!

Don't get me wrong; I have experienced Duncan's wisdom, nonviolence, and creativity many times. He has much to offer. Most people would agree; however, he is very different. First, Duncan is so thin it is unbelievable. This is largely due to not getting enough nutritious food. Talk about the starving artist!

Duncan is a visionary and a prophet. However, he really suffered at the hands of his mother and cannot get over it. I guess the years of electroshock and confinement reinforced the anger, isolation, and so on. Much to his credit, given his painful upbringing, I have heard him say many incisive, complimentary things about women in general.

Duncan has very deeply influenced me towards nonviolence. I love to get him talking and pouring out his startling insights. It is a funny and very awakening experience to hear some of the unique things he'll say.

The way he puts words together is creative and some of his concepts are very important. One is: "Our society has a way of excluding people, so sometimes truly creative people end up on the edge." He also says, "I'm hoping people will become acquainted with certain homeless people. They have some truly positive things to give."

But he can also sound like a broken record. Duncan is not perfect; nobody is. He leaves much to be desired, sometimes. It is important to try to get into new territory with him. Otherwise, you just hear the same old stuff.

"Our society has a way of excluding people, so sometimes truly creative people end up on the edge." — B.N. Duncan

Picasso once said: "I don't develop, I am." The same can be said of Duncan (or anyone who fulfills their true destiny). Part of the time, perhaps much of the time, Duncan is fulfilling a destiny that was "revealed" when he was a young kid. You can see that inquisitive, analytical side of him developing in his own depiction of himself as a professorial kid enjoying bugs, in his publication *Nature and Spirit*.

Duncan suffered greatly as a child. What is our destiny? Although hard to pinpoint how destiny shapes our life, it seems that when we follow our natural bent, we can take part in the unfolding of our personal destiny while also contributing substantially to humanity's growth.

I feel Duncan has done this with his art, his street anthropology, and his long years of supporting his fellow street artists and nurturing their growth by publishing them and collaborating with them.

Duncan has enjoyed substantial media attention for his *TELEGRAPH AVENUE STREET CALENDAR*, an annual chronicle of the lively people on the fringes of Berkeley. The Associated Press has run articles about his work. *The Comics Journal* ran a favorable profile in March, 1996 ("B.N. Duncan Goes to the Museum"), and he appeared on Dan Rather's news program in 1990.

Duncan does have a good heart at times, and he is a true friend of homeless people (and others on the margins of society). He has contributed substantially to many publications on homelessness, including *TELE TIMES*, *Street Spirit*, and the *Homeless Voice*, formerly published by the Berkeley Chaplaincy to the Homeless. His drawings have tremendous educational value; his output is prodigious and his cartoons are very visceral. His many book reviews help highlight new publications and new perspectives about the world of the poor and homeless.

Brenda Praeger, a great artist who curated the Addison Street Windows for the City of Berkeley, had some very wonderful insights about Duncan. She likes his style and the way he draws. Praeger said that even his cartoons about spanking women were aggressive but not violent. She said that they were a "young boy's fantasies," and were not offensive.

I believe there is much that is paradoxical and mysterious about life. This is also true of Duncan. I feel like nominating him for some sort of alternative Nobel Prize because of his creative way of thinking.

Part of what makes him interesting to listen to is his passion, his professorial tone, and his need for love. There are so many things I could compare him to, but I fear it might turn into a fatal freeway pile-up of random metaphors, or a grisly shooting spree of meaningless analogies. You would have to be there to understand. And if you've got the money, give the poor guy some food. He deserves it.

Duncan speaks eloquently about the soul. When animals and whales are killed, it is our soul that suffers. He also speaks forthrightly about what it is to be a man, and ponders the path of our development.

I read a statement from the psychotherapist Carl G. Jung that applies to Duncan: "In the final analysis, we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted."

Poetic Exhortations for Justice and Mercy

Bundle o'Tinder

Poems by Rose Kelleher

Waywiser Press

Review by Mary Meriam

Why do we read poems? Poems can be songs, prayers, chronicles, confessions, memories, meditations, complaints, portraits. Poems give us contact with the world and people and help us feel less alone. Reading a poem can be a moment of pleasure in an otherwise painful world.

Sometimes poems speak for us when we can't find the words, when it all seems too terrible. Here's where we can be thankful for Rose Kelleher's brave, strong book of poems, *Bundle o'Tinder,* published by Waywiser Press. This book wrestles demons to the ground and pins them there, crushed.

In Kelleher's poem, "Lourdes," compassion is in full force. Lourdes is a grotto in France, with spring water that many pilgrims believe can heal. With great gusto, Kelleher writes:

"Burst the spigots. Overflow.
Send mercy surging down the mountainside,
washing over every borderline.
Don't just stand there. Go."

These commanding lines are just one stanza in a four-stanza poem, which ends with the line "Cure my doubt." We do not find wishy-washy tones in *Bundle o'Tinder,* but unabashed exhortations for justice and mercy.

It so happens that I read Kelleher's manuscript as she was preparing to enter it in a contest. I told her it was so good, she would surely win. And folks, she won the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize! The contest was judged by the renowned poet, Richard Wilbur, who wrote in the foreword, after listing some of his favorite poems, "I suspend my list of good poems, lest it go on and on."

Now I have something of the same happy dilemma: how to choose one poem for you, out of so many good ones.

While "Lourdes" is a poem of tremendous sincerity, "*Laissez-faire*" *is a satirical response to a heartless* remark made by the British Treasury Secretary in 1846, about the Great Irish Famine, when 25 percent of the population of Ireland died of starvation.

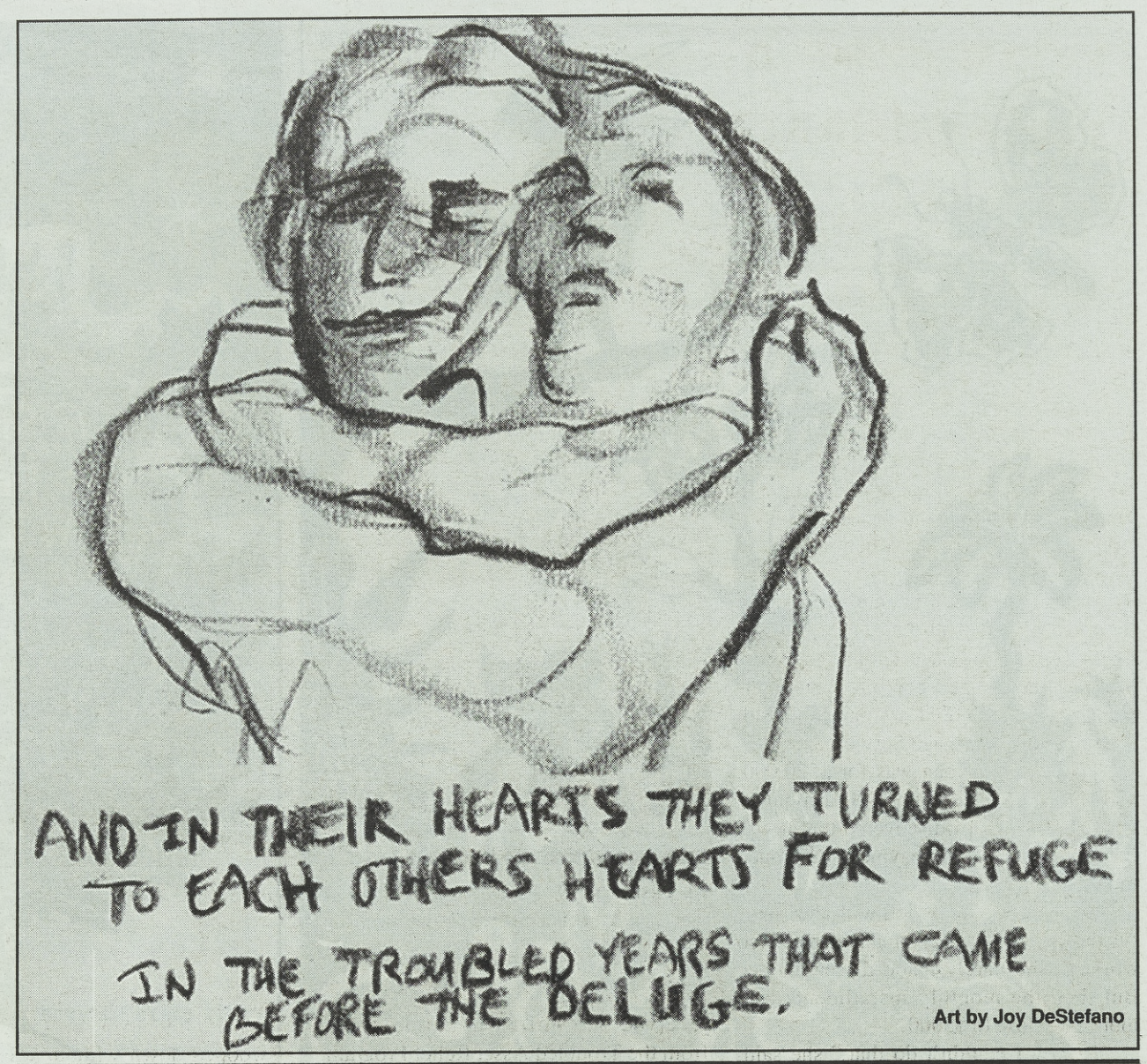
Laissez-faire

"[The overpopulation of Ireland] being altogether beyond the power of man, the cure has been applied by the direct stroke of an all-wise Providence..."

— Charles Trevelyan, British Treasury Secretary, 1846

The extra folk. The fat. The gristle.
Ragweed, nettle, buckthorn, thistle.
Girls in shirtwaist factories.
Brushwood burned to free the trees.
Dusty little Mom-and-Pops.
Apple peelings, turnip tops.
The latchkey kid, the lemon rind,
the poor New Orleans left behind.
The trampled ant, the straying sheep,
the badly schooled, the compost heap
that must decay to feed the crop.
John Henry's carcass, should he drop;
his life, his living, should he live.
The damn we frankly do not give.
The sack in which we drown the whelp
(as Nature sometimes needs our help).

The brisk, efficient meter, short phrases, short lines, and tight, true rhymes, are like the short, sharp strokes of a broom sweeping away detritus. All the "f" sounds in the first four lines produce a percussive spitting effect. The poem is a felicitous pile of images of society's unfortunate outsiders. Except that here, the outsiders are swept together into the poet's warm heart, recognized and comforted.



Art by Joy DeStefano

Kelleher's poem "Laissez-faire" is a felicitous pile of images of society's unfortunate outsiders. Except that here, the outsiders are swept together into the poet's warm heart, recognized and comforted.

"It's not a question of an issue, but a question of the people I know who are close to me, who are health-care workers or living with illnesses, or the neighbors, housed and homeless, I pass on the street, or the grocery store that goes out of business where I've bought my salad and broccoli every day for the past five years. All of those may be reflected or transformed in my work..." —Marilyn Hacker

"Laissez-faire" is French for "allow to do," and it means a policy or attitude of letting things take their own course, without interfering. By paying attention to people, the poem "Laissez-faire" reverses the meaning of its title. In the great line, "The damn we frankly do not give," satire works to reverse the course of a distant, uncaring attitude, and bring home the message of the damn we frankly *do* give.

"The First Uprising" has such a beautiful first line, it's like an entire poem in itself: "The blackest plums are closest to the sun." There's a symmetry to the line with blackest/closest and plums/sun, and a striking opposition between black and sun. We usually hear of planets, not plums, being close to the sun.

The poem that follows this intriguing first line is about human evolution, a subject that arises in several other poems in the book, including the gorgeous, tender-hearted sonnet, "Neanderthal Bone Flute."

These lines from the poem, "Not Our Dog," place us in the common human dilemma of homelessness or imminent homelessness.

But trouble spies on us behind the blinds,
a giant dog that's caught our scent. At night,
its eyewhite glows between the slats, its breath
fogs the windowpane; and while we hide
at home, the mangy world of war, disease
and famine hunkers down to wait for us.

Those of us already caught by the "giant dog," can be thankful we've found a respite in Rose Kelleher's poems.

Find more about Rose and her first, miraculous book of poems, *Bundle o'Tinder,* online at Waywiser Press website: http://waywiser-press.com/kelleher.html

Gravity

by Rose Kelleher

**The innocent play dirty tricks
and win our grief in monstrous trades:
Six million Jews. Haditha. AIDS.
Three Belfast boys in '96.**

**It's in our blood. We feel the pull
of family, country, color, creed,
regardless of the other's need.
The boys we know are beautiful.**

**My own, my kind, my tribe — my tide
is faithful to your moon, it swallows
strangers in its wake and follows
you, its white, familiar guide.**

The Crasher

by Rose Kelleher

**A naked, wild-eyed man burst through the door,
astounding all the party guests, and stumped
directly to the center of the floor.
His stare was so unnerving that we jumped
to make a path for him. With legs apart,
he stood among us, pale and flabby-rumped,
and tapped a glass to call the crowd to order.**

**We hushed, and when he cleared his throat to start,
I wished I'd thought to bring a tape recorder.
With thundering zeal that left no room for doubt,
"Good poetry," he cried, "comes from the heart!"
With that, the bouncers came and threw him out.**

Replaced This Week With Self-Checkout Lanes at Giant

by Rose Kelleher

**The woman in her sixties with the short
immobile curls and West Virginia accent,
who seemed naive somehow, like a young girl,
even with upper arms like hams, and breasts
that sagged. She had a subtle overbite,
liked to commiserate about the rain,
the cruel futility of dieting,
the crazy customer who'd caused a scene.
When Christmas rolled around, her doughy face
would brighten; she'd move faster, brag about
the absurd number of pies she had to make.**

**The tiny Indian woman with the deep-
set eyes, the waist-length braid. She didn't rush,
but smiled dreamily, bony knuckles grasping,
lifting each item as if it were a jug
of milk and not a 4-oz bag of shredded
mozzarella. Gingerly she'd place
canned beans and tubs of butter on the bottom,
the bread on top, prompt me if I forgot
my bonus card. Said how-are-you on cue,
but if you cracked a joke, she'd fake a laugh,
not getting it, thinking you were weird.**

**The girl who wore thick glasses, and whose name
was similar to mine, a silly kind
of kinship that we shared. Her hair was short,
incompetently straightened in stiff points
combed back from her wide face. She would remark
on what I bought, how boneless breast had been
on sale just yesterday, a dollar less;
too bad I hadn't come here yesterday.
Bit of a wit, she'd sometimes needle me
about my absent-mindedness, but then
politely add that she was just as bad.**

Foreclosure in West Oakland

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As Tasha Alberty *(center)* leaned on her brother and cried, her father Charles said, "There's something wrong with this country. My daughter just needed a house for her family. What was she supposed to do?" David Bacon photo

the door locks so the family couldn't get back in. Other workmen nailed sheets of plywood over every window to keep the Albertys out. And a new brass and steel padlock was fastened to the gate.

Tosha Alberty and her husband James, a cancer survivor, had lived in the home with four children and two grandchildren for four years. Tosha had grown up in the same neighborhood, and had been house-hunting for a long time when she found the place in 2005.

Although she was unemployed at the time, her mother had died and left her a little money. She talked with a real estate broker, who pushed her into a nonconforming loan with no down payment, with First Franklin Mortgage Services.

"I thought my loan was for $520,000, and that I'd be paying $2800 a month," she recalled. "But I discovered that it was for $550,000, and the payment was much more."

Alberty got a union job with the county, though, where her husband had also worked. She barely made the payments. But then the monthly installments ballooned to close to $5000.

"I knew I couldn't do that," she said. "But when I tried to renegotiate them, they said that since I'd been paying before, they wouldn't help me. So I stopped paying." The loan went into default.

First Franklin, which moved from making normal mortgages to nonconforming loans back in 1994, boasted on its website that "First Franklin makes it easy for mortgage brokers to find flexible, hassle-free home loan solutions."

The lender was bought by Merrill Lynch in 2006. Merrill Lynch closed in last year's financial meltdown, and was bought for $50 billion by Bank of America.

In mid-July, Bank of America reported second-quarter profits of $2.4 billion, its second straight profitable quarter since the mortgage crises started, despite losses from bad loans. No wonder. The bank received $45 billion in bailout money from the Troubled Asset Relief Program.

None of that money is going to the Albertys though, despite promises that the bailout would enable the renegotiation of loans, and keep people in their homes.

Bank of America, however, did spend $2.3 million in 2008 on lobbying Congress, and another $1.5 million this year. The bank wants flexibility on how it spends that TARP money, with fewer restrictions on huge bonuses for executives, on fees for credit card holders, and even on home mortgage lending to other Oakland residents.

When First Franklin's "hassle-free solution" became her eviction, Alberty joined ACORN's Home Defender campaign. Twice in May, the sheriffs came to put the family out, and twice they met a resolute group determined to keep the Albertys from being dumped on the sidewalk. That's undoubtedly why they swooped down without warning on July 20, just after Tosha had left for work.

ACORN Home Defender Martha Daniels, who herself had been threatened with a foreclosure eviction, held an impromptu press conference that afternoon in front of the padlocked iron gate. She vowed, "We will find a way to put Tosha and her family back into this house. There is no justice here."

Representatives of Oakland City Council members and an Alameda County Supervisor announced their support.

As Tasha Alberty leaned on her brother and cried, her father Charles said, "There's something wrong with this country. My daughter just needed a house for her family. What was she supposed to do?"

Only a few days later, community activists responded to the pliglht of the family. On July 31, Home Defender activists held a sit-in on the steps of the home of Tosha Alberty, her husband, four children and two grandchildren, to protest their eviction after First Franklin Mortgage Services, owned by Merrill Lynch and Bank of America, foreclosed on the home.

Community activists in the Home Defenders campaign of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) sat in on the house steps behind the padlocked gate in an act of civil disobedience, and were arrested for trespassing by the Oakland Police.

David Bacon's book, *Illegal People — How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants,* was given the C.L.R. James Award for best book of 2007-2008 by the Working Class Studies Association.

In Thrall to King Booze

Rhythm and Booze

Poems by Julie Kane

University of Illinois Press

Review by Mary Meriam

Once upon a time, there was a powerful ruler called King Booze. Almost all the people were in thrall to King Booze, who was vicious and bloodthirsty and sucked the life out of his people.

Only the most brave subjects of King Booze managed to escape his clutches. These brave souls formed little groups, but still, it wasn't the same as being part of King Booze's mighty nation. They were lonely.

> The loneliness we get at night
> by water, with a rising moon,
> can't be drowned in alcohol.
> *("Halloween on the Nile")*

In Booze, there were Bartenders, who carved tattoos on the boozers. Then bloody Booze concealed pain with false beauty, and the boozers belonged by blood to the Bartenders.

> I see men's arms and want a flower
> carved into them, your rose tattoo.
> *("The Bartender's Tattoo")*

Young boozers played chess with their mothers and remembered early invisible tattoos, given by their mothers, who were all Queens of King Booze.

> Drifting in and out of my skin,
> I heard her rattle the kitchen pots,
>
> or thought I heard her gliding like
> a queen across the checkered floor,
> up the dark diagonals
> of linoleum tile, and out the door
> *("Chess with My Mother")*

In King Booze's churches, the beat of the blues concealed pain with false rhythm. The boozers were seduced by Booker's playing into thinking they were "just asleep," and the boozers belonged by darkness to the churches of the dead, the Bars.

> Who cares about the way things used to be,
> except us creatures of the slime, who love
> the darkness and the dead—the Maple Leaf
> with Booker playing, Maddox "just asleep."
> *("Mapleworld; or Six Flags over the Maple Leaf")*

A brave soul, Julie Kane, told the story of Booze and escape from Booze. There was a river, the Big Muddy, cutting a path through Booze, where the ashes of boozers were scattered. It was by this cold, muddy river that Kane decided to cut loose from Booze and shake herself awake.

> Or the morning we gave back Everette's ashes:
> homeless alcoholic poet-prince.
> A cold March wind was ruffling the water.
> Wouldn't you know, the ashes wouldn't sink;
> so someone jumped in to wrestle them under.
> It hit me then: I didn't want to die.
> And so I made a choice, against my nature,
> to throw my lot in with that moving line:
> abstract, rational, conscious, sober—
> cutting a path through human time.
> *("Ode to the Big Muddy")*

Her tattoos longed for the false rhythms of Booze, and the Bartenders and the Bars. Yeats wrote: "The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation — the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation— by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety."

> I mark each sober day with a cross.
> I come to joy in a season of loss.
> *("The Bartender Quits Drinking")*

She's alone and lonely. No one else is there. She tries to keep busy. No one can see her. No one notices her, outside the reach of King Booze. "What we call 'the power of the word' is really a pattern of words in a rhythm originating in heartbeat and footfall." (Anne Stevenson)

> I busied myself for a while collecting
> a volume of my letters,
> and published them six months ago,
> but no one has taken notice.
> *("Letter from Laura Cereta (Brescia, 1488)")*

She finds true rhythms in words. The words become poems. "Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe." (Adrienne Rich) The moon rises over Louisiana.

> We do not raise a cup of wine to the quarter moon
> Because this hard-won clarity has its own enchantment.
> *("After Reading Po Chu-i")*

Julie Kane's book, *Rhythm and Booze,* won the 2002 National Poetry Series, selected by Maxine Kumin.





Images of desolation are everywhere in Detroit — abandoned, gutted warehouses, burned-out family homes, and fire-sale prices on vacant houses. Photos by Robert L. Terrell

Desolation Row, Detroit

Fed up with crime and economic collapse, hundreds of thousands have packed their belongings and decamped. Detroit has lost more than half of its population.



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town area where big, gleaming, gambling casinos sit in isolated splendor hard on the shores of the muscular Detroit River.

The first signs of the massive decay underway in the heart of the city are the abandoned, boarded-up businesses. Soon after one crosses the city's perimeter, they appear on both sides of the street in growing numbers. For block after block, vacant buildings are interspersed with greasy spoon restaurants, junk dealers, second-hand stores and down-market pawnshops.

Garbage and trash line the streets in heaps that are frequently shoulder-high. Weed-filled lots are so common, and so grossly overgrown, that it is difficult to reject the notion that much of the city is returning to bush of the sort associated with the African outback. Excepting stores whose primary product is beer and wine, there is no commercial presence in many neighborhoods.

Moreover, the distressing truth is that in virtually every section of town, burned-out hulks of abandoned buildings dominate the setting. They come in all shapes and sizes, many of them old, and once distinguished. In a way, the burned-out hulks that tens of thousands of people used to call home, have come to symbolize contemporary Detroit.

Their smell of old, rotting wood permeates the air in many neighborhoods. The sagging hulks of the abandoned, burned-out homes that litter the city's neighborhoods have their own distinctive smell. It is a nauseating, acrid, oily odor that clings to the insides of one's nostrils, reminding one with every breath of the terrible tragedy unfolding across this once proud, confident city.

Detroit still contains streets that would be considered attractive in most major U.S. cities. But virtually all of them are located two or three blocks away from rat-infested neighborhoods that reek of human misery of the sort synonymous with abject Third World poverty. The two words most useful in describing the scene are abandonment and decay.

Moreover, every indication is that the neighborhoods where most Detroiters subsist are experiencing an escalating rate of decline and deterioration, represented most dramatically in the form of collapsing homes, institutions and infrastructure. This demoralizing process includes all of the social pillars that anchor communities, and channel their aspirations for personal and communal achievement.

Detroit residents speak in slow, measured voices when they discuss the devastating forces of destruction that dominate their lives. This is particularly the case when they are reminded of the large number of schools, churches, businesses, and social service agencies that have been boarded up and abandoned during recent years. Their sense of abandonment is palpable, and it has come to dominate their troubled perspectives of the future.

Given the plethora of financial, social and political crises Detroit residents are enduring with no hope of substantive relief, it is difficult to reject the strong impression that many are victims of a municipal version of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder of the sort associated with warfare.

In addition, Detroit residents are experiencing substantial stress due to the growing number of alcoholics and drug addicts moving into the tens of thousands of abandoned buildings located throughout the city. Down and out, with little or nothing to lose, members of these particularly desperate cohorts are frequent sources of deadly violence and crime. As a result, many beleaguered residents have become wary and withdrawn.

They have good reasons to be wary. Detroit consistently ranks as one of the cities with the highest crime rate in the United States. For example, in 2007, Detroit was ranked sixth in the nation for violent crime in cities with populations exceeding 500,000 residents. In 2008, there were 368 homicides in Detroit, making it the nation's murder capital for cities with more than 500,000 residents.

Over the past 25 years, Detroit has averaged approximately one murder per day. The fact that 65-70 percent of the city's murders are associated with illegal drugs provides a rough sense of the death grip that narcotics have on residents.

When two teenagers recently shot and wounded seven junior high school students waiting for a bus to take them home from summer school, none of the scores of people who witnessed the violent assault dared to identify the perpetrators. Talking to the police about such matters can easily produce a street-level death sentence.

A great deal of time, attention and fiscal resources have been devoted to upgrading the Detroit Police Department during the past two years, but to little avail. Detroit is still one of the most dangerous cities in the nation. Moreover, there is little indication that the situation will improve any time soon.

Rape, robbery and burglary continue to be major problems in most areas of the city. Extremely violent drug syndicates dominate the streets and commons areas in many neighborhoods. Given the police department's inadequate efforts to cope with the situation, citizens protect themselves, as best they can, in their homes behind bolted doors and barred windows.

Crime is one of the myriad reasons why Detroit's population is collapsing. Fed up with the danger and uncertainty engendered by the omnipresent threat of crime, hundreds of thousands of Detroiters have packed their belongings and decamped. This is particularly true of the city's white residents, who have left in such large numbers that few of them are left.

It should be noted that whites are not alone in the abandonment of the city. Middle-class people from every racial group are participating in an escalating wave of out migration. Few subjects upset Detroiters more than the escalating rate in which the city is hemorrhaging residents.

In 1950, Detroit was booming and the future looked as if it would be endlessly bright. At the time, Detroit had 1.9 million residents, making it the fourth largest city in the United States. But the postwar optimism, and booming economic progress engendered by the expanding automobile industry, began heading south by the onset of the 1960s.

With the passage of each succeeding decade, conditions in the city worsened. The net result is that Detroit has lost more than half of its population. Current estimates indicate that the population is approximately 920,000. Approximately 1,200 residents per month are leaving, and Detroit is now the eleventh most populous city in the United States. Experts are predicting that the city will eventually lose at least 400,000 additional residents.

Given this, city and state official are preparing for the time in the not-too-distant future when Detroit is expected to collapse as a consolidated municipality. Some suggest that the city will shrink into a small enclave centered on the downtown area. Others suggest that major portions of city land will be returned to agriculture.

Desperate future prospects of this sort are having a devastatingly depressive impact on property values. This past April, there were 6,259 foreclosures in the Detroit metropolitan area, one for every 303 housing units. Bank-repossessed properties are being sold in bundles of 100 or more, with each house selling for less than $10,000. Seeking to profit from the city's misery, buyers are flying in from afar to take advantage of perceived opportunities. They include wealthy entrepreneurs and flush groups of buyers from locations as distant as California, Australia and China.

The city's remaining residents know that they are enmeshed in the vortex of a collapsing financial system. More than one of every five municipal residents is unemployed. Tens of thousands more will lose their jobs in the immediate future due to the imploding automobile industry.

Constrained by a precipitous downward trend in city revenues, largely due to the catastrophic exodus of taxpaying residents, the municipal government is incapable of reversing the rate and scale of economic collapse. Although their finances are in somewhat better shape than Detroit's, nearby county governments are incapable of providing appreciable financial assistance. And the state government is nearly bankrupt.

Although the Obama administration is providing financial assistance to the automobile industry, it has no plans to address the broad array of problems currently sucking life and vitality from Detroit, and the scores of nearby communities that depend on it for their own financial viability.

Most important, there are many good reasons to believe that Detroit's decline will not prove to be unique. Two decades ago, Michael Moore's film "Roger and Me" focused attention on the desperate plight of residents in Flint, Michigan, in the wake of the closure of local General Motors production plants. Flint has not recovered, and in the interim, several other major Michigan cities have declined so precipitously that they are in danger of replicating Detroit's tragic collapse.

Finally, there are many good reasons to believe that Detroit's desperate plight will be replicated in other major industrial cities across the nation. While there is time to prepare, the nation's leaders need to turn their attention to the endangered fate of urban, industrialized America.

If nothing else, they need to understand that if they can't save Detroit, and similarly situated American cities, there is little or no possibility that they will prove capable of saving far-off targets of imperial hubris such as Baghdad and Kabul.